

House Committee on Elections and Ethics
519 Anderson House Office Building, Lansing MI
Testimony to HIB 5974
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Thank you for allowing me to present this testimony to the committee today. I am Nancy Bedell, Secretary of Michigan Election Reform Alliance, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving election administration and voter access in Michigan, and one of several representatives from MERA to the Michigan Election Coalition, which coordinates election activity among non-profits in Michigan. MERA has been working since 2006 as an all-volunteer organization on a very low budget. I am the only West Michigan member of MERA and often the only West Michigan representative working with the Michigan Election Coalition. My home is in Grand Rapids Township.

MERA members are very disturbed that the Committee on Elections and Ethics of the Michigan House of Representatives should be proposing legislation which essentially would discourage voting as would be the case with HIB 5974. This legislation does nothing which state and national voting rights organizations propose as important enhancements to voting, making it simpler, easier and thus more inclusive. Total voting rates around the country are stagnant or declining. The organization Nonprofit Vote reports that young people and low-income voters each continue to represent only 13% of the voters in the recent election.

We hope the Legislature would support some of the Michigan Secretary of State's proposals for improving voting such as no-reason absentee voting or other proposals such as an early voting period (applied currently in 32 states) and election day registration. All of these initiatives would help to solve the problem of lines which form particularly during presidential elections. Long lines disenfranchise voters who cannot wait for long periods in line just to cast a ballot due to job and family commitments.

Other suggestions made by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights under Law in their report to the Presidential Commission on Election Administration in 2013 include: assuring that precinct size is uniform, making registration portable from federal agencies as well as from the states' Departments of Motor Vehicles.

The Michigan Election Reform Alliance (MERA) has been supporting these enhancements. We want the Committee to understand and appreciate the work that we are doing studying election administration, accuracy of tabulators, attempting to

prevent unnecessary voter purges, proposing legislation and doing ongoing voter protection during elections. We partner with Michigan Election Coalition in many of these efforts.

In my role as an election protection volunteer in five recent elections, I have seen voters turned away or otherwise struggle to cast their ballot. There are serious challenges to the freedom and accessibility of voting in Michigan that need your attention.

We urge you to partner with us to improve the voting climate in Michigan using tested and tried methods used in many other states, rather than making voting more complicated thus depressing the vote even further.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today.